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# Collaboration: What It Takes

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Collaboration in community corrections is a necessity. No longer do we have the luxury of going it alone. However, collaboration is difficult to achieve. It requires both sharing resources with and enhancing the capacity of another agency. Nothing could be more difficult to accomplish. Without a conscious, directed focus on a shared vision of the future, agencies find it difficult to achieve genuine collaboration. So why should we attempt such a difficult task? Because the rewards of a genuine interorganizational collaboration—in productivity, in effectiveness, and in the personal satisfaction of those involved—are so great.

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by Bill Woodward,  
Consultant,  
Boulder, Colorado

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The articles in this issue of *Topics in Community Corrections* highlight the efforts of a variety of community corrections agencies to improve collaboration within the criminal justice systems in which they operate. These are success stories. Sometimes, however, a collaboration turns out to be fragile, starting strong, only to fade—and then occasionally to reappear. What makes some collaborative efforts work very well while others are failures?

The answer to this question may be contained in the work of Carl Larson and Frank M. LaFasto, who studied highly successful teams. The teams included mountain climbing teams, the McNuggets team, the Macintosh development team, the USS Kittyhawk aircraft carrier management team, a presidential cabinet, the DeBakey heart transplant team, a Centers for Disease Control team, the Challenger disaster investigation team, and many more. These teams, these ultimate “collaborations,” shared eight characteristics:

- ◆ A clear, elevating goal—Clear visions are the hallmark of effective teams. If you do not know where you are going, how do you know when you get there?
- ◆ Principled leadership—Strong team leaders avoid compromising the team’s objectives, have a personal commitment, do not dilute team efforts with too many priorities, treat members fairly, confront inadequate performance, and are open to new ideas and information.
- ◆ A results-driven structure—To be effective, a criminal justice structure must be designed for problem solving, and teams must see trust as their highest value. But other types of teams may be designed for creativity or for tactical situations. A team focused on creativity, such as the Macintosh team, must value autonomy to be effective. A tactical team must value clarity to be effective.

tive, as, for example, an aircraft carrier or police SWAT team must have extremely clear operating orders to be successful.

- ◆ Competent team members—Each team member must have all the essential skills, as well as a strong desire to contribute and a capacity to collaborate.
- ◆ Unified commitment—Unified commitment is often called “team spirit.” Successful teams are committed to the vision without allowing “groupthink” or “splintering.”
- ◆ Standards of excellence—Successful teams are under pressure to perform, want to “make a difference,” and define consequences for both success and failure.
- ◆ Collaborative climate—Trust is the critical element in a collaborative climate. Trust itself is characterized by honesty, openness, consistency, and respect/dignity.
- ◆ External support—Successful teams know that their work is valued; they have unambiguous, substantial support from others.

The success of the interagency collaborations in community corrections is based at least in part on the extent to which they follow these principles for effective teams. Some of the articles in this issue describe community-based approaches, some are focused on work with local family services, many report partnerships with other types of agencies, and some mix criminal justice collaborations with community collaborations.

### **Roots of Collaboration**

The business community in this country discovered the strategic importance of collaboration long ago. Michael Hammer describes the process of reengineering the corporation, which emphasizes outcomes and customers over the traditional fiefdoms of sales, marketing, manufacturing, MIS, transportation, and so on. So, too, must the criminal justice system move away from the fiefdoms of law enforcement, prosecution, courts, corrections, defense, victims, jails, probation, parole, and community corrections.

In their book, *Built to Last*, Collins and Porras describe the characteristics of the visionary companies whose stock rose more than 15 times between 1926 and 1990. A dollar invested in a “visionary” company in 1926 would be worth \$6,356 in 1990, compared to a dollar invested in an average company over the same period, which would be worth only \$4,153. Many visionary companies make use of collaboration, according to Porras, who says that visionary companies are known for rejecting the tyranny of the ‘OR’ and embracing the genius of the ‘AND.’ That is, these companies avoid demonizing anyone and bring everyone along. We all recognize that some criminal justice system actors still demonize other parts of the system. However, in the examples described here, the collabo-

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rators worked not to demonize each other but to find the best of each other in the most difficult situations.

Finally, Meg Wheatley in her book, *Leadership and the New Science*, identifies collaboration as a major structure of the universe. At one time we saw planets as separate unrelated entities, but now we know that they all influence each other. At one time we saw electrons, protons, and neutrons as separate atomic particles, but now we know that they are bound by the “dark” force. At one time we thought that we could go it alone, but now we know that we exist only in the relationship to others. In fact, our entire existence is only possible in partnership with others.

### What is Collaboration?

The term “collaboration is often used interchangeably with terms such as “networking,” “cooperation,” and “coordination.” Chris Huxham, in *Creating Collaborative Advantage*, provides a clear definition of these terms and makes clear how collaboration is different from these others:

- ◆ Networking is the exchange of information for mutual benefit;
- ◆ Coordination is the exchange of information and the altering of activities for mutual benefit and to achieve a common purpose;
- ◆ Cooperation is the exchange of information, the altering of activities, and the sharing of resources for mutual benefit and to achieve a common purpose; and
- ◆ Collaboration is the exchange of information, the altering of activities, the sharing of resources, and the enhancement of the capacity of another for the mutual benefit of all and to achieve a common purpose.

The richness of the examples of collaboration in the following articles illustrate that collaboration is indeed possible and that it can raise the spirit and create productive change in day-to-day work of community corrections professionals. ■

### References

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#### **For more information:**

Bill Woodward  
Consultant

P.O. Box 17271

Boulder, Colorado, 80308

Telephone: 303-440-4797

Fax: 303-442-3232

E-mail: [wwoodward@aol.com](mailto:wwoodward@aol.com)